

**BIOLOGICAL
EVALUATION
for
Snowy Range Ski Area
Improvements**

November 2019

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Prepared for:

U.S. Forest Service,
Medicine Bow-Route National Forests,
Thunder Basin National Grassland
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Snowy Range Ski and Recreation Area is located in the Laramie Ranger District of the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest (MBR NF) in Albany County, Wyoming. The ski and recreation area operates on National Forest System (NFS) lands under a Special Use Permit (SUP) from the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USFS).

Snowy Range proposes a number of replacements and upgrades of existing facilities, new facilities, increased snowmaking efforts, and the widening and leveling of one ski run. The MBR NF is initiating an environmental review of the Proposed Action as mandated by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Based on the resource analyses, the Decision Maker will decide whether to authorize the Proposed Action via a Finding of No Significant Impact.

Laramie Ranger District, MBR Supervisor's Office, and Mountain Resorts team members made site visits to the location in late summer and early fall of 2019 to gain familiarity with the general habitat and site conditions. This assessment is based on these field visits, GIS and Google Earth analysis of the project component areas. The proposed project area is within subalpine ecosystems from approximately 11,200 to 13,000 feet. Vegetation types include spruce-fir forest in the upland areas, with wetlands and beaver ponds around the base area.

2.0 PROPOSED ACTION

The purpose of this project as to the Forest Service is to replace outdated equipment and to improve the visitor experience without changing the overall family-friendly local setting of the location. The ski and recreation area has had few improvements made in recent years as it went through bankruptcy and changes in ownership. The project is addressing a backlog of minor changes and improvements that might have otherwise occurred.

Chute life:

- 1) Replace Top Terminal At Chute Lift
- 2) Chute from Double to Triple lift after top terminal change

Other actions

- 1) Add Yurt and Vault Toilet at base of Sundance
- 2) Re-Grade Warpath and Lower Centennial/Magic Carpet area
- 3) Secondary Parking Bridge to Main Lot
- 4) New Snowmaking
- 5) Patrol/Customer structure at top of Chute (after other changes)
- 6) Second parking lot in the Carbon Power and Light corridor
- 7) Hazard tree removal throughout the permit area

Improvements to the top of the Chute Lift. Replace the existing top terminal with one that would allow for easier and quicker loading and unloading. This could also include upgrading the lift from a double to a triple. This would involve removing some of the existing equipment, but

not the foundation for that equipment.

Eventually, a ski patrol/warming hut may also be added on top of that foundation.

The base of Sundance is proposed to receive a yurt and a vault toilet.

The Warpath ski run is proposed to be regraded to level areas that are currently off-camber.

Access from one of the parking areas to the lodge area is currently managed via a snow bridge over the creek or by having visitors walk along the road. Snowy Range proposes to replace these access methods with a new footbridge over the creek.

New snowmaking is proposed, using existing but previously unused water rights. In conjunction with the snowmaking, a beaver dam that currently holds in a retention pond would be replaced with an artificial dam as a means to enhance the reliability of the pond to be used as a water source for snowmaking.

An additional parking lot is proposed, to be placed in an existing cleared utility corridor between two existing parking areas.

Finally, hazard tree removing would be conducted throughout the ski and recreation area.

3.0 PROJECT DESIGN CRITERIA

- Spill containment kits must be placed on construction equipment and operators must be trained to use such kits to contain or mitigate spills/HAZMAT.
- A Spill Prevention Plan will be in place and reviewed by Snowy Range Ski Area and Forest Service prior to the initiation of construction
- All hazardous material spills will be reported immediately to the required State and Federal agencies, as well as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Wyoming Fish and Game.

4.0 LOCATION MAPS

5.0 THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES

The following list is derived from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's web-based application Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) on March 11, 2020. This includes species that may be present in the area, as well as species that could be impacted by any off-site impacts that might occur.

Table 1: IPaC list

	Known/possible	Critical Habitat	Management Structure
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	presence, or off-site		
Canada lynx <i>Lynx canadensis</i>	Possible presence	Project location is outside of Critical Habitat	Southern Rockies Lynx Amendment
Least tern <i>Sterna antillarum</i>	Off-site	No critical habitat designated.	Platte River Recovery Implementation Program
Piping plover <i>Charadrius melodus</i>	Off-site	Project location is outside of Critical Habitat	Platte River Recovery Implementation Program
Whooping crane <i>Grus Americana</i>	Off-site	Project location is outside of Critical Habitat	Platte River Recovery Implementation Program
Pallid sturgeon <i>Scaphirhynchus albus</i>	Off-site	No critical habitat designated.	Platte River Recovery Implementation Program
Western Prairie Fringed Orchid <i>Platanthera praeclara</i>	Off site	No critical habitat designated.	Platte River Recovery Implementation Program

Canada lynx. The project area is within the Snowy Range East Lynx Analysis Unit (LAU). The closest linkage area is the Lake Creek Road unit, 12 miles south of the ski area. The ski area permit area itself includes a mix of “Primary Suitable”, “Secondary Suitable”, and “Unsuitable” habitat. The Warpath and lower Sundance ski runs are within Secondary Suitable Habitat, this is the only part of the project that includes any removal of non-hazard trees. The current estimate is that about 2.5 acres of tree removal may need to be removed, partly to account for the leveling of the run and partly to account for snowmaking equipment. The Chute lift passes through unsuitable habitat, with a few trees removed if the lift. Lynx screens are attached.

SLRA Standards & Guidelines Considered

OBJECTIVE ALL O1: Maintain or restore lynx habitat connectivity in and between LAUs, and in linkage areas.

The proposed project would have no impact on Lynx connectivity. The construction period is short-term, for one summer; regular winter use after that would be no different than the current winter use. The activity is located 12 miles from the closest linkage area. It would not cause any affects to lynx habitat connectivity, nor would it affect the linkage areas. Connectivity for lynx habitat would remain.

STANDARD ALL S1: New or expanded permanent developments and vegetation management projects must maintain habitat connectivity in an LAU and/or linkage area.

Some new development would occur, but it would all fall within the current boundaries of the ski area, in areas already developed (for example, a new yurt and bathroom, but both placed in a currently cleared and groomed area at the base of a ski run).

GUIDELINE HU G3: Recreational development and recreational operational uses should be planned to provide for lynx movement and to maintain the effectiveness of lynx habitat.

This project will have no long term impact on Lynx movement because the project is not near any linkage areas, and there is less than five acres of tree removal.

OBJECTIVE HU O2: Manage recreational activities to maintain lynx habitat and connectivity.

Lynx habitat connectivity will not be affected by this activity only about two acres of new persistent snow compaction will occur and less than five acres of vegetation within habitat will be altered.

OBJECTIVE HU O1: Maintain the lynx's natural competitive advantage over other predators in deep snow, by discouraging the expansion of snow-compacting activities in lynx habitat.

The project occurs in existing winter use area of the ski area permit boundary. A maximum of about two areas of new compaction may occur with the regrading of the ski run

GUIDELIEN HU G10: Designated over-the-snow routes or designed play areas should not expand outside baseline areas of consistent snow compaction unless designation serves to consolidate use and improve lynx habitat. This may be calculated on an LAU basis, or on a combination of immediately adjacent LAUs.

Other than a slight widening of one ski run, there is no new ski terrain associated with this project.

OBJECTIVE HU O3: Concentrate activities in existing developed areas, rather than developing new areas in lynx habitat.

No new developed areas on Forest Service land will occur as a result of this activity. The project occurs exclusively within or adjacent to previously developed terrain within the existing ski area permit boundary.

OBJECTIVE HU O5: Manage human activities, such as special uses, mineral and oil and gas exploration and development, and placement of utility transmission corridors, to reduce impacts on lynx and lynx habitat.

The limited nature of this activity will likely have a very negligible impact on lynx and lynx habitat.

GUIDELINE HU G8: Cutting brush along low-speed, low-traffic-volume roads should be done to the minimum level necessary to provide for public safety.

This will not occur as a result of this activity and does not apply to this proposal.

Chute Lift upgrades are likely to affect, but not likely to adversely affect Canada Lynx through the removal of 3-4 trees associated with widening the lift from a pair to a triple.

All other actives are also likely to affect, but not likely to adversely affect Canada lynx, except for the water retention dam replacement and new snowmaking, which have no affect to Canada lynx.

Platte River species:

The water withdrawals associated with this project were analyzed as part of the 2006 Platte River Recovery Implementation Plan and are covered under the Biological Opinion (BO) for that plan, dated June 16 2006. Although Snowy Range has not used yet used the full water right reserved and analyzed within that BO, those rights are still valid and are still covered under the BO (as confirmed through communication with the Wyoming State Engineer's office). As such, this project would not require consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service. There would be no impact to the five Threatened and Endangered Species covered under the Platt River Recovery Implementation

Program beyond what has already been analyzed in the BO.

5.0 TABLE 1: OCCURRENCE INFORMATION – R2 SENSITIVE SPECIES

The following species list is derived from the Rocky Mountain Region TEPS Species List updated December 18, 2018 and updated Occurrence Matrix dated September 24, 2019.

Highlighted species will be carried forward for analysis. Species or species' habitat not known or suspected in or near the project area will not be carried forward for analysis.

Species	Basic Habitat Description	Known or Suspected to be Present in/near Project Area	Suitable Habitat Present in/near Project Area
SENSITIVE AMPHIBIANS			
Boreal toad <i>Anaxyrus boreas</i>	Mountain wetlands and forest	No	Yes
Northern leopard frog <i>Lithobates pipiens</i>	Riparian and wetland areas	No	No
Wood frog <i>Lithobates sylvatica</i>	Mountain wetlands	Yes	Yes
Northern goshawk <i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	Mature forest generalist (conifer & aspen)	No	No
Boreal owl <i>Aegolius funereus</i>	Mature spruce & fir	Yes	Yes
Chestnut-collared longspur <i>Calcarius ornatus</i>	Plains, prairies. Breeds in the general region of shortgrass prairie, but in areas of slightly longer grass and scattered taller weeds. Winters in shortgrass prairies and fields.	No	No
Grasshopper sparrow <i>Ammodramus savannarum</i>	Open grasslands, prairies, hayfields, and pastures, typically with some bare ground	No	No
Ferruginous hawk <i>Buteo regalis</i>	Open grasslands and shrub steppe communities.	No	No
Greater sage-grouse <i>Centrocercus urophasianus</i>	Large continuous areas of sagebrush on gentle terrain	No	No
Black tern <i>Chlidonias niger</i>	Freshwater marshes (summer) and marine coasts (winter)	No	No
Northern harrier <i>Circus cyaneus</i>	Grasslands, agricultural lands and marshes	No	No
Olive-sided flycatcher	Conifer forest with snags	No	

Species	Basic Habitat Description	Known or Suspected to be Present in/near Project Area	Suitable Habitat Present in/near Project Area
<i>Contopus cooperi</i>	and openings		No
Black swift <i>Cypseloides niger</i>	Vertical rock faces near waterfalls or dripping caves	No	No
American peregrine falcon <i>Falco peregrinus anatum</i>	Foothill and mountain cliffs	No	No
Bald eagle <i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	Open-branched trees near larger lakes, streams, rivers and reservoirs.	No	No
White-tailed ptarmigan <i>Lagopus leucura</i>	Alpine tundra (willow and krummholtz)	No	No
Loggerhead shrike <i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	Open country with scattered trees and shrubs, prairie	No	No
Lewis's woodpecker <i>Melanerpes lewis</i>	Open pine forests with snags, cottonwoods and pinyon-juniper woodlands	No	No
Mountain plover <i>Charadrius montanus</i>	Short-and mixed-grass prairies dominated by blue grama (<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>) where preferred sites are heavily grazed by livestock	No	No
Sagebrush sparrow <i>Artemisiospiza nevadensis</i>	Sagebrush obligate with some use of nearby Pinyon-Juniper.	No	No
Purple martin <i>Progne subis</i>	Old-growth aspen near water at 8,000-9,000 ft elevation	No	No
Brewer's sparrow <i>Spizella breweri</i>	Sagebrush	No	No
Columbian sharp-tailed grouse <i>Tympanuchus phasianellus columbianus</i>	Sagebrush-steppe and mountain shrublands	No	No
White-tailed prairie dog <i>Cynomys leucurus</i>	Open or slightly brushy mountain valleys	No	No
River otter <i>Lontra canadensis</i>	Streams and lakes	No	Yes
American marten <i>Martes americana</i>	Spruce/fir and mixed conifer forests	Yes	Yes
Fringed myotis <i>Myotis thysanodes</i>	Caves and old buildings Oak, pinyon, fir and pine forests below 8,000 feet elevation	No	No

Species	Basic Habitat Description	Known or Suspected to be Present in/near Project Area	Suitable Habitat Present in/near Project Area
Hoary bat <i>Lasiurus cinereus</i>	Deciduous and coniferous forests with openings	No	No
Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep <i>Ovis canadensis canadensis</i>	Open mountain slopes with rock outcrops/cliffs	No	No
Townsend's big-eared bat <i>Corynorhinus townsendii</i>	Shrublands, pinyon-juniper woodlands and montane forests with caves and mines	No	No
Pygmy shrew <i>Sorex boylii</i>	Moist forest with grassy openings	No	Yes
Wyoming pocket gopher <i>Thomomys clusius</i>	Areas with Gardner's saltbush, often in combination with other moderately halophytic species typically found in relatively flat areas of fine-textured soil	No	No
Colorado River cutthroat <i>Oncorhynchus clarkia pleuriticus</i>		No	No
Hornyhead chub <i>Nocomis biguttatus</i>		No	No
Mountain sucker <i>Catostomus platyrhynchus</i>		No	No
Yellowstone cutthroat <i>Oncorhynchus clarkia bouyeri</i>		No	No
Rocky Mountain capshell <i>Acroloxus coloradensis</i>	Habitat is high-altitude lakes and ponds.	No	No
Arogos skipper <i>Atrytone gregos</i>	Undisturbed tall and mid-grass prairie; plains, foothills	No	No
Hudsonian emerald (dragonfly) <i>Somatochlora hudsonica</i>	Bogs and springs, sedge bordered lakes.	No	Yes (uncertain)
Monarch butterfly <i>Danaus plexippus plexippus</i>	Wide ranging species	No	uncertain
Ottoe skipper <i>Hesperia ottoe</i>	Mixed grass prairie, dry to mesic with little bluestem and sideoats grama	No	No
Regal fritillary <i>Speyeria idalia</i>	Tall grass prairie, damp meadows, marshes, mountain pastures	No	Yes
Western bumblebee	Wide ranging species	No	Yes

Species	Basic Habitat Description	Known or Suspected to be Present in/near Project Area	Suitable Habitat Present in/near Project Area
<i>Bombus occidentalis</i>			

6.0 EFFECTS ANALYSIS –DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE

Boreal toads have previously been reported close to the ski/recreation area. The species was seen just east of the ski area boundary once in 1987, no newer records of sightings exist. Wyoming Fish and Game surveyed the area for amphibians in 2015 and again in 2016; they found boreal wood frogs but no boreal toads. Given the decline of the species and the lack of recent sightings, it is very unlikely that any toads exist anywhere nearby.

Wood frog have been documented near the project area, on the north side of Highway 130 and in the wetlands just east of the parking area recorded by Wyoming Game and Fish Department surveys in 2015 and 2016. Suitable habitat includes small breeding ponds, wetlands (including wet meadows) and bogs, all with partial canopy cover. Near-ground high humidity seems to also be a requirement. Inactive beaver ponds may be used, but beaver activity may disrupt egg masses. Potential impacts to wood frogs include short term impacts during construction and the potential to spread chytrid fungus.

Boreal owls exist near the project site, having been recorded nearby at least as recent as 2005. There are no known nests or territories within the project area, but boreal owls may occur there in suitable spruce and fir habitats with available nesting cavities where uncompacted areas of snow are available for hunting.

American martens likely occur within the project area and remain active year-round. Martens are more likely to use the project area in the summer months when human disturbance is minimal. Marten prey species are available in the project area year-round, as are competing predators (e.g. coyote).

River otter have not been documented in the project area. The stream and beaver ponds in the area could be suitable habitat. The replacement of the beaver dam with an artificial dam could reduce the potential habitat value. This would be reduced if the new dam filled the same hydrologic function as the current dam.

Pygmy shrews have not been documented in or near the project area, but suitable habitat may be present within the project area in mesic and wet forested and meadow. Pygmy shrews remain active in the subnivean spaces during the winter months. Ground disturbing activities within these habitats have the potential to directly affect pygmy shrews using forest floor and duff environments.

The Hudsonian emerald butterfly has not been documented in the project area, but suitable habitat may be present in the beaver ponds and wetlands around the parking lots and lodge area. There could be short term impacts associated with construction of the new dam. Those impacts would not continue into the long term if the new dam allows for hydrologic conditions similar to current conditions.

Western bumblebee has undergone a severe range-side decline. The species has not been documented in the project area, but bumblebees were once common enough to avoid mention. Impacts may occur from the loss of flowering plants associated with the leveling of the Warpath ski run. The severity and duration of this impact could vary depending upon how much effort is made to set aside and replace topsoil as well as revegetation efforts after grading is complete.

Cumulative Impacts:

Boreal toad has undergone severe range-wide decline due to the introduction of chytrid fungus.

Western bumblebee have also undergone severe rangewide decline, although the precise reasons are still unknown.

7.0 TABLE 2: DETERMINATION SUMMARY FOR SENSITIVE SPECIES

Species	Determination	Rationale
Boreal Toad <i>Anaxyrus boreas</i>	MAII	Documented historic (presently unoccupied) presence within the project area. Project design criteria should protect habitat from potential impacts from fuel or other petroleum product leak or spill.
Wood Frog <i>Lithobates sylvatica</i>	MAII	Documented presence. Only a small part of the project area is suitable habitat, and this is negligible in relation to the overall size of habitat in the local area. Project design criteria can further limit harm to the species and its habitat.
Boreal owl <i>Aegolius funereus</i>	MAII	No known nests in project area, but very difficult to detect. Noise and disturbance from during tree removal, grading and chairlift construction could cause short-term deterrence impacting nesting in the vicinity.
River otter <i>Lontra canadensis</i>	NI	River otter are not current present in the project area and have not been present there for many years. The installation of the retention dam could cause some short term habitat impacts corresponding to the duration of the construction project, but with no otter present, there would be no impact at all.
American marten <i>Martes americana</i>	MAII	Temporary displacement of marten and prey possible during construction activities. Loss of 2.5 acres of habitat which is negligible relative to the overall available habitat.
Pygmy shrew <i>Sorex boyi</i>	MAII	Temporary noise and disturbance effects during construction.
Hudson emerald (dragonfly) <i>Somatochlora hudsonica</i>	NI/MAII	Uncertainty due to lack of surveys for this species in the project area. However, any impacts to this species would be temporary in nature, caused by the replacement of the beaver dam.
Regal fritillary (butterfly) <i>Speyeria idalia</i>	NI/MAII	Uncertainty due to lack of surveys for this species in the project area. However, few impacts to wetlands and marshes are expected.
Western bumblebee <i>Bombus occidentalis</i>	NI/MAII	Uncertainty due to lack of surveys for this species in the project area. Depending upon specific project design, this project could result in some loss of habitat (2.5 acres). Project Design Criteria requiring revegetation should prevent that.
<i>Selaginella selaginoides</i> club spikemoss	NI/MAII	Uncertainty due to lack of surveys for this species in the project area. However, the project area would be a small part of the overall species habitat, and impacts would be temporary.
<i>Botrychium paradoxum</i>	NI/MAII	Uncertainty due to lack of surveys for this species in the project

peculiar moonwort		area. However, the project area would be a small part of the overall species habitat, and impacts would be temporary.
<i>Carex diandra</i> lesser panicled sedge	NI/MAII	Uncertainty due to lack of surveys for this species in the project area. However, the project area would be a small part of the overall species habitat, and impacts would be temporary.
<i>Eriophorum gracile</i> slender bristlegrass, or slender cottongrass	NI/MAII	Uncertainty due to lack of surveys for this species in the project area. However, the project area would be a small part of the overall species habitat, and impacts would be temporary.
<i>Festuca hallii</i> plains rough fescue	NI/MAII	Uncertainty due to lack of surveys for this species in the project area. However, the project area would be a small part of the overall species habitat, and impacts would be temporary.
<i>Astragalus leptaleus</i> park milkvetch	NI/MAII	Uncertainty due to lack of surveys for this species in the project area. However, the project area would be a small part of the overall species habitat, and impacts would be temporary.
<i>Salix candida</i> sageleaf, or sage willow	NI/MAII	Uncertainty due to lack of surveys for this species in the project area.
<i>Viburnum opulus</i> var. <i>americanum</i> American cranberrybush, or mooseberry	NI/MAII	Uncertainty due to lack of surveys for this species in the project area. However, the project area would be a small part of the overall species habitat, and impacts would be temporary.

NI = No Impact; BI=Beneficial Impact; MAII=May Adversely Impact Individuals, but is not likely to cause a trend towards Federal listing or result in loss of viability in the planning area; AI= Adverse Impact, likely to cause a trend towards Federal listing or result in loss of viability in the planning area

Non-sensitive plants and Animals

Beaver ponds are present in the wetlands north of the lodge area. The proposed action includes the replacement of one of the beaver dams with an artificial dam. The artificial dam would have roughly the same dimensions and water retention as the existing dam but would be permanent. This could have some impact on beaver in the area, but possibly not substantial impact. The dam would probably only impact part of the wetland, beaver would continue to be able to forage and use the pond that is currently retained by the beaver dam after the artificial dam is built, although there could be short-term disturbance during construction.

The following plant and alga species have been collected in or near the project area (as determined through records search of the Intermountain Herbarium Consortium)

<i>Allium textile</i>	Textile onion
<i>Astragalus parryi</i>	Parry's milkvetch
<i>Cardamine breweri</i>	Brewer's bittercress
<i>Carex pachystachya</i>	Chamisso sedge
<i>Castilleja linariifolia</i>	Wyoming Indian paintbrush
<i>Castilleja rhexifolia</i>	Rosy paintbrush
<i>Chara globularis</i>	Fragile stonewort
<i>Climacium dendroides</i>	Tree climacium moss
<i>Eleocharis palustris</i>	Common spikerush
<i>Epilobium hornemannii</i>	Hornmann's willowherb
<i>Epilobium lactiflorum</i>	Whiteflower/milkflower willowherb
<i>Equisetum</i> sp	Horsetail rush

<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	Bird's-foot trefoil
<i>Mimulus guttatus</i>	Seep monkeyflower
<i>Oreochrysum parryi</i>	Parry's goldenrod
<i>Osmorhiza depauperata</i>	Bluntseed sweetroot/blunt-footed sweet cicely
<i>Phleum pratense</i>	Timothy grass
<i>Pinus contorta</i> var. <i>latifolia</i>	Lodgepole pine
<i>Salix bebbiana</i>	Bebb's willow
<i>Salix drummondiana</i>	Drummond's willow
<i>Salix farriae</i>	Farr's willow
<i>Salix lasiandra</i> var. <i>caudata</i>	Greenleaf willow
<i>Salix planifolia</i>	Diamondleaf willow
<i>Salix glauca</i> var. <i>villosa</i> (<i>S. pseudolapponum</i>)	Grayleaf willow
<i>Salix wolfii</i> var. <i>wolfii</i>	Wolf's willow
<i>Senecio eremophilus</i> var. <i>eremophilus</i>	Desert ragwort
<i>Senecio triangularis</i>	Arrowleaf ragwort
<i>Silene latifolia</i>	Bladder campion
<i>Solidago simplex</i> var. <i>simplex</i>	Mt. Albert goldenrod
<i>Verbascum thapsus</i>	Wooly mullein
<i>Veronica wormskejoldii</i>	American alpine speedwell

8.0 REFERENCES

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9.0 Attachments



